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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: MARINICH RELEASED

REF: A. 04 MINSK 754

[1](#)B. 04 MINSK 965
[1](#)C. 04 MINSK 1303

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GEORGE KROL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Imprisoned opposition member Mikhail Marinich was released from jail April 14 after serving two years on trumped up charges. A Minsk court April 12 ruled to release Marinich a full year earlier than his sentence required. The 66-year-old Marinich, Belarus' former Ambassador to Latvia and former Minister of External Trade, was sentenced in 2004 to five years in prison for alleged misappropriation of Embassy computer equipment provided to his NGO. The courts later reduced his sentence to 2.5 years. Marinich suffered a stroke in prison and his health has deteriorated. His son reported to Post on April 14 that Marinich is feeling well and in very good spirits. Many expected Marinich to be released after the elections, viewing his incarceration as an effort by Lukashenko to remove a once serious rival. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Marinich, a former Ambassador to Latvia and former Minister of External Trade, was arrested in late April 2004 on patently false charges he had stolen USG-donated computer equipment from his NGO (reftels). In December 2004 he was sentenced to five years in prison. This sentence was reduced in February 2005 to 3.5 years and in August 2005 to 2.5 years. Since his imprisonment, Marinich suffered a mini-stroke and his health has deteriorated. The Minsk Central District Court in an April 12 hearing granted Marinich an early release. He was released early in the morning April 14, and his sons took him home. His son Igor told Post Marinich is feeling fine and is in reasonably good health, and that his spirits are high.

A Purpose Behind Marinich's Release?

[1](#)3. (C) Poloff met with Igor Marinich on April 12. Igor claimed a close contact within the GOB told him in March that Marinich would serve his full term. Only a week ago the same contact forewarned Marinich's family that he could be released early. Igor attributes this development to Lukashenko's poor health and subsequent slipping grip on power. According to Igor, his father was part of the nomenklatura, who are now seeking someone who could possibly shield it from blame when the regime falls. The nomenklatura sees Marinich, not opposition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich or Aleksandr Kozulin, as someone who could defend them when the time comes. Igor said this was a sign Lukashenko's support within the GOB is crumbling. (Note: Marinich's future plans will obviously depend on his health and his desire to again challenge the regime. Igor stated that the family hopes to

bring Mikhail to Latvia, where Marinich was Ambassador and where the family still has strong business ties, for proper medical treatment.)

Comment

¶4. (C) While Igor's theory on his father's release is possible, many saw Marinich as a possible presidential challenger to Lukashenko, one who would be acceptable to Russia. With elections over, and Marinich recovering from his stroke, the regime may simply have decided he is no longer a threat. Regardless of this release, the number of political prisoners incarcerated in Belarus continues to grow. Post will continue to lobby for their release as well.
Krol